



**AMERICAN RIVER
CONSERVANCY**
Preserving Rivers and Land for Life

A Brief History of Landmark Wakamatsu Farm

On June 8, 1869, the first Japanese settlers in North America arrived in a region called “Gold Hill” near the historic town of Coloma where the California gold rush began. American River Conservancy (ARC) now owns the 272-acre historic location of the *Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm Colony*. For the first time in the land’s long history, ARC has been inviting the world to experience the marvelous cultural, natural, and agricultural resources found at landmark Wakamatsu Farm during public events, tours, classes, field trips, and private bookings.

Just 45 miles east of Sacramento, Wakamatsu Farm is California Registered Historical Landmark #815 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Recognized by many as the “Japanese American Plymouth Rock,” Wakamatsu Farm holds three distinguishing first honors:

- Site of the first Japanese Colony in America
- Birthplace of the first birthright Japanese American citizen
- Resting place of Okei, the first Japanese immigrant and woman buried on American soil

It was 20 years after the gold rush began when young Okei accompanied at least 22 farmers, carpenters, samurai, and others to establish their tea and silk farm on the Placerville property. When she died at the age of 19 in 1871, Okei became a symbol of dignity and sacrifice for future Japanese immigrants pursuing the American dream. Okei’s story is so highly revered by people of Japanese heritage that they have been paying their respects at her gravesite for over a century. In prior years, countless people risked trespassing when the Farm was family-owned. Now ARC manages the property as a pilgrimage site, outdoor learning campus, event venue, and working farm.

While the Japanese farmers succeeded for merely a few years, their immigration story holds the greatest fascination for visitors near and far. Long before the Colonists’ arrival, the bountiful Gold Hill region was home for countless generations of native people whose way of life was tragically upended during the gold rush. During the 1850’s until 2011, the Farm’s fertile soils sustained the Graner and Veerkamp pioneer families. Now ARC leases the land to independent farming operations that have grown wholesome, organic food using regenerative farming techniques to feed the community.

The biodiversity of Wakamatsu Farm is also remarkable and unique to the Sierra Nevada foothills region. Scenic rolling fields connect a mosaic of springs, streams, wetlands, and oak woodlands. Picturesque farm ponds attract migratory species and sustain abundant year-round wildlife. The Conservancy is equally dedicated to preserving the natural, agricultural, and extraordinary cultural resources of Wakamatsu Farm – *in perpetuity*.

As working farmland with resident farmers, this heritage site is not a public park. Visitors are welcome to year-round scheduled events found at ARC’s event calendar at ARConservancy.org/events. To schedule a private tour, please contact the Conservancy.

Discover more about the actual living history of Wakamatsu Farm at ARConservancy.org/wakamatsu.

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